

teetotums. They made only one leap and fell back immediately, dazed. Others held out longer. . . . Their madness communicated itself to us; we fled, unable to stand it any longer.

Biskra

"Who invented music?*" Athman asks; I answer: "Musicians did." He is not satisfied; he insists. I reply seriously that God did. "No/* he says immediately, "the devil did."

And he explains to me that to the Arabs all musical instruments are instruments of the devil except the two-stringed viol, whose name I cannot remember, with a very long neck and a sounding-box made of a hollowed-out tortoise. The street singers, poets, prophets, and tellers of tales provide their own accompaniment by playing this viol with a little bow, and they often play so suavely that, says Athman, "a door of heaven seems to open/*

Those singers, those poets intrigue me. What do they sing? And the goatherds, interrupting themselves with their flute? And Sadek with his gusla? And Athman himself, alone or with Ahmed, each on his horse at Touggourt? At times it is a sort of dialogue; I listen but cannot make out a single word. Athman, whom I consult, answers: "No, they are not words at all; it is simply poetry!" By insisting I succeed, these last few days, in getting him to transcribe and translate some of these songs. They are the very ones, unwritten, that the street singers sing, seated on the ground or at the door of a cafe, and that a group of silent Arabs surrounding them listen to, or that they sing to themselves in the solitude of long marches. I don't know if they will please anyone who doesn't know this country; I hardly dare say that I consider them very beautiful and that I think the oral tradition of that Arab poetry, whether ancient or modern, worthy of attention by students of folklore.

Perhaps next
year I shall try to gather a little collection of these
songs for publica-
tion. Here are two of them; I give them here just as
Athman gave them
to me, merely correcting the spelling:

*For two years I have ceased making love and called
myself religious.*

*I made my trip to the North; I found Bay a at the
celebration.*

She put on the comb and the ear-rings,

And the dagger, with the mirror. . . .

Her hair falls on all sides,

Weighted with gold, well arranged.

No one can buy her.

Nothing but she or I. . . .

The girls asked for some coins;

And I was weak (for I am poor).